THE GREAT CASE OF Liberty of Conscience Once more Briefly Debated & Defended,

BY THE

Authority of *Reason*, *Scripture*, and *Antiquity*:

Which may serve the Place of a General Reply to such late Discourses, as have Oppos'd a Tolleration.

The Author *W. P.*

For whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, that do you unto them, Matth. 7. 22.

Render unto Cæsar, *the things that are* Cæsars; *and to* God, *the things that are* Gods, Matth. 22. 27.

Printed in the Year, 1670.

TO THE

Supream Authority

OF

ENGLAND.

TOLLERATION (for theſe ten years paſt) hath not been more the *Cry of ſome*, then PERSECUTION hath been the *practice of others*, though not on *Grounds equally rational.*

The preſent cauſe of this *Addreſs*, is to ſolicite a *Converſion* of that *Power* to our Relief, which hitherto hath been imploy'd to our depreſſion; that after this large experience of our Innocency, and long ſince expir'd Apprentiſhip of *Cruel Sufferings*, you will be pleas'd to cancel all our Bonds, and give us a Poſſeſſion of thoſe Freedoms to which we are entituled by *Engliſh Birthrigh.*

This

This has been often Promiſed to us, and we as earneſtly have expected the Performance; but to this time we labour under the unſpeakable preſſure of *naſty Priſons*, and daily *Confiſcation* of our *Goods*, to the apparent ruine of intire Families.

We would not attribute the whole of this ſeverity to *Malice*, ſince not a little ſhare, may juſtly be aſcrib'd to *Miſ-intelligence*:

For 'tis the infelicity of Governours *to ſee and hear* by the *Eyes* and *Ears* of other men; which is equally unhappy for the People.

And we are bold to ſay, that *Suppoſitions* and *meer Conjectures*, have been the beſt *Meaſures*, that moſt have taken of Us, and of our *Principles*; for whilſt there have been none more *inoffenſive*, we have been mark'd for *Capital Offenders*.

'Tis hard that we ſhould alwayes lie under this undeſerved imputation; and which is worſe, be Perſecuted *as ſuch, without the Liberty of a juſt Defence.*

In ſhort, if you are apprehenſive, that our *Principles* are inconſiſtent with the *Civil Government, grant us a free Conference about the Points in Queſtion*, and let us know, what are thoſe Laws, eſſential to preſervation, that our Opinions carry an Oppoſition to? And if upon a due enquiry we

are

are found so *Hetrodox*, as represented, it will be then but time enough to inflict these *heavy penalties* upon us.

And as this *Medium* seems the faireſt, and moſt reaſonable; ſo can you never do your ſelves greater Juſtice, either in the vindication of your proceedings againſt us, *be we criminal*, or *if Innocent*, in diſingaging your *ſervice* of ſuch, as have been *Authours* of ſo much Miſ-information.

But could we once obtain the favour of ſuch debate, we doubt not to evince a clear conſiſtency of our *Life* and *Doctrine* with the *Engliſh Goverment*; and that an indulging of *Diſſenters* in the Sence defended, is not onely moſt *Chriſtian* and *Rational*, but prudent alſo. And the *contrary* (how plauſibly ſoever inſinuated) the moſt *injurious* to the *Peace*, and *deſtructive* of that diſcreet *Ballance*, which the Beſt and Wiſeſt *States* have ever carefully Obſerv'd.

But if this fair and equal *Offer*, find not a place with you, *on which to reſt his Foot*; much

leſs that it ſhould bring us back *the Olive Branch of* TOLLERATION; *We heartily embrace and bleſs the Providence of God*; and in his Strength reſolve, by *Patience, to outweary* PERSECUTION, and by our *conſtant Sufferings*, ſeek to obtain a *Victory more glorious*, than *any our Adverſaries can atchieve by all their Cruelties.*

Vincit qui patitur.

Newgate, *the 7th of the 12th Moneth*, 1670.

From a Priſoner for Conſcience-ſake,

W. P.

THE

The PREFACE.

WEre *some as* Christian, *as they boast themselves to be, 'twould save us all the Labour we bestow in rendring* Persecution *so* unchristian, *as it most truly is: Nay were they those men of Reason they Character themselves, and what the* Civil Law *stiles good* Citizens, *it had been needless for us to tell them, that neither can any external Coercive Power convince the understanding of the poorest* Idiot, *nor Fines and Prisons be judg'd fit, and adequate Penalties for Faults purely intellectual; as well as that they are destructive of all civil Government.*

But we need not run so far as beyond the Seas, to fetch the sence of the Codes, Institutes, *and* Digests, *out of the* Corpus Civile *to adjudge such practices, incongruous with the good of civil society, since our own good, old, admirable* Laws *of* England, *have made such excellent provision for its* Inhabitants, *that if they were but thought as fit to be executed by this present Age, as they were rightly judg'd neseſſary to be made by our careful Ancestors: We know how great a* Stroak *they would give such, as venture to lead away our Property in* Triumph (*as our just Forfeiture*) *for only Worshipping our God in a differing Way, from that which is more generally Profest and Establisht.*

And indeed, it is most truly lamentable, That above others (who have been found in so Un-natural and Anti-christian an Imployment) those, that by their own frequent Practices and voluminous Appologies, *have defended a* Separation *from the* Papacy) *should now become such earnest Persecuters for it, not considering, that the Enaction of such Laws, as restrain Persons from the free Exercise of their* Consciences, *in matters of* Religion, *is but a knotting Whip-cord to lash their own* Posterity; *whom*

they can never promise to be conformed to a national Religion. *Nay, since Mankind is subject to such Mutability, they can't ensure themselves, from being taken by some Perswasions, that are esteem'd Hetrodox, and consequently ketch themselves in Snares of their own providing. And that men thus lyable to change, and no wayes certain of their own Belief to be th'e most infallible,) as by their multiply'd Concessions, may appear) to enact any Religion, or prohibit Persons from the free Exercise of theirs, sounds harsh in the Ears of all modest and unbya'st men. We are bold to say* our Protestant Ancestors *thought of nothing less, then to be succeeded by* Persons Vainglorious of their Reformation, *and yet* Adversaries to Liberty of Conscience; for to People in their Wits, it seems a Paradox.

Not that we are so ignorant, as to think it is within the reach of humane Power to fetter Conscience, or to restrain its Liberty strictly taken: *But that plain English, of Liberty of Conscience, we would be understood to mean, is this; namely,* The Free and Uninterrupted Exercise of our Consciences, in that Way of Worship, we are most clearly perswaded, God requires us to serve him in (without endangering our undoubted Birthright of English Freedoms) which being matter of FAITH, we Sin if we omit, and they can't do less, that shall endeavour it.

To tell us, we are Obstinate *and* Enemies to Government, *are but those Groundless* Phrases, *the first* Reformers *were not a little pestered with; but as they said, so say we, The being call'd* this, *or* that, *does not conclude us so; and hitherto we have not been detected of that* Fact, *which only justifies, such Criminations.*

But however free we can approve our selves of Actions prejudicial of the Civil Government; 'tis most certain we have not suffered a little, as Criminals, *and therefore have been far from*

from being free from Sufferings; indeed, in some respect, Horrid Plunders: Widdows *have lost their* Cows, Orphans *their* Beds, *and* Labourers *their* Tooles. *A Tragedy so sad that methinks it should obliege them to do in* England, *as they did at* Athens; *when they had sacrificed their Divine* Socrates *to the sottish fury of their* lewd *and* commicil *Multitude, they so regreeted their hasty Murder, that not only the Memorial of* Socrates *was most venerable with them, but his Enemies they esteem'd so much theirs, that none would Trade or hold the least Commerce with them; for which some turned their own Executioners, and without any other Warrant then their own Guilt, Hang'd themselves. How neer akin the wretched Mercenary Informers of our Age are to those, the great resemblance that is betwixt their Actions manifestly shews.*

And we are bold to say, the grand Fomenters *of Persecution, are no better Friends to the English State, then were* Anytus *and* Aristophanes *of old to that of* Athens, *the case being so nearly the same, as that they did not more bitterly envy the Reputation of* Socrates *amongst the* Athenians, for his Grave and Religious Lectures (*thereby giving the* Youth *a diversion from frequenting their* Plays) *then some now emulate the true* Dissenter, *for his Pious Life, and great Industry.*

And as that famous Common-wealth *was noted to decline, and the most observing Persons of it, dated its decay from that illegal and ingrateful Carriage towards* Socrates (*witness their dreadful Plagues, with other multiply'd Disasters*) *So it is not less worthy Observation, that* Heaven *hath not been wholly wanting to scourge this Land, for, as well their* Cruelty *to the* Conscientious, *as their other multiplied Provocations.*

And when we seriously consider the dreadful Judgments that now impend the Nation (*by reason of the* Robbery, Violence *and unwonted* Oppression, *that almost every where, hath not only been committed upon the* Poor, *the* Widdow, *and the* Fatherless, *but*

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most tenaciously justified, and the Actors manifestly encourag'd) in meer pitty, and concern, for the everlasting welfare of such as have not quite sinn'd away their Visitation *(for some have) we once more bring to publick view, our Reasons against* Persecution, *backt with the plainest Instances, both of* Scripture *and* Antiquity. *If but one may be perswaded, to desist from making any farther progress in such an* Anti-protestant, and truly Anti-christian Path, *as that of Prosecuting honest and vertuous English-men, for only worshipping the God that made them, in the Way they judge most acceptable with him.*

But if those, who ought to think themselves oblieg'd to weigh these affairs with the greatest deliberation, will obstinately close their Eyes to these last Remonstrances; *and slighily over-look the* pinching case of so many thousand Families, *that are by these severities expos'd for Prey, to the unsatiable appetites of a Villanous* Crew of broken Informers *(daubing themselves with that deluding Apprehension of pleasing God, or at least, of profiting the Country (whilst they greatly displease the one, and evidenty ruin the other) as certain as ever the* Lord God Almighty destroy'd *Sodom,* and lay'd waste *Gomorah, by the consuming Flames of his just Indignation; will he hasten to make desolate this wanton Land, and not leave an Hiding-place for the* Oppressor.

Let no man therefore think himself too bigg to be admonish'd, nor put too slight a value upon the Lives, Liberties, *and* Properties *of so many thousand free-born English Families, Embarqu't in that one concern of* Liberty *of* Conscience. *It will become him better to reflect upon his own Mortallity, and not forget his Breath is in his Nostrils, and that every Action of his Life the everlasting God will bring to Judgment, and him for them.*

W. P.

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CHAP. I.

That Impoſition, Reſtraint, and Perſecution for Conſcience ſake, highly Invade divine Prerogative, and Diveſt the Almighty of a Right, due to none beſides himſelf, and that in five Eminent Particulars.

THE great Caſe of *Liberty of Conſcience*, ſo often *Debated* and *Defended* (however diſſatisfactorily to ſuch *as have ſo little Conſcience as to perſecute for it*) is once more brought to publique view, by a late Act againſt *Diſſenters*, and Bill of an additional one, that we all hop'd the wiſdom of our Rulers had long ſince lay'd aſide, as what was fitter to be paſs'd into an *Act* of perpetual *Oblivion*. The Kingdoms are alarum'd at this procedure, and Thouſands greatly at a ſtand, wondring what ſhould be the meaning for ſuch haſty Reſolutions, that ſeem as fatal as they were unexpected: *Some ask, What Wrong they have done? Others, What Peace they have broken? And all, What Plots they have form'd, to prejudice the preſent Government; or Occaſions given, to hatch new Jealouſies of them and their Proceedings*, being not conſcious to themſelves of Guilt in any ſuch reſpect.

For mine own part, I publickly confeſs my ſelf to be a *very hearty Diſſenter from the eſtabliſh't Worſhip of theſe Nati-*

ens, as believing *Proteſtants* to have much degenerated from their firſt Principle, and as owning the poor diſpiſed *Quakers* in Life and Doctrine, to have eſpous'd the Cauſe of God, and to be the undoubted Followers of Jeſus Chriſt, in his moſt Holy, Straight, and Narrow Way, that leads to the eternal Reſt; In all which I know no Treaſon, nor any Principle that would urge me to a Thought injurious to the Civil Peace. If any be defective in this particular, 'tis equal, both *Individuals*, and whole *Societies*, ſhould anſwer for their own Defaults; but we are clear.

However, all conclude that *Union* very *Ominous*, and *Unhappy*, which makes the firſt diſcovery of it ſelf, *by a* John Baptiſts *Head in a Charger*, They mean that *Feaſt* ſome are deſin'd to make upon the *Liberties* and *Properties* of Free-born *Engliſh*-men, *ſince to have the Intail of thoſe undoubted hereditary Rights cut off (for matters purely relative of another World) is a ſevere Beheading in the Law*; which muſt be obvious to all, but ſuch as meaſure the juſtice of things only by that proportion they bear with their own intereſt.

A ſort of men that ſeek themſelves, though at the apparent loſs of whole Societies, *like to that barbarous Fancy of of old, which had rather that* Rome *ſhould burn, then it be without the ſatisfaction of a Bone-Fire.* And ſad it is, when men have ſo far ſtupified their underſtandings with the *ſtrong doſes of their private intereſt*, as to become inſenſible of the Publicks. Certainly, ſuch an Over-fondneſs for ſelf, or that ſtrong inclination, to raiſe themſelves in the ruin of what doth not ſo much oppoſe them, as that they will believe ſo, becauſe they would be perſecuting, is a malignant Enemy to that Tranquility, *which all diſſenting Parties ſeem to believe, would be the conſequence of a Tolleration.*

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In short, We say there can be but two ends in *Persecution*, the one to satisfie (which none can ever do) the *insatiable appetites of a decimating Clergy* (*whose best Arguments are Fines and Imprisonments*) and the other, as thinking therein *they do God good Service*; but 'tis so hateful a thing upon any account, that we shall make it appear by this ensuing Discourse, to be a declared Enemy to *God*, *Religion*, and the good of *Humane Society*.

The whole will be small, since it is but an *Epitomy* of no larger a tract then 14. sheets; yet divides it self into the same particulars, every of which we shall defend against *Imposition*, *Restraint*, and *Persecution*, though not with that scope of *Reason* (nor consequently *Pleasure* to the *Readers*) being by other contingent Disappointments, limited to a narrow stint.

The Tearms Explained, and the Question stated.

First, By *Liberty of Conscience*, we understand not only a meer *Liberty of the Mind*, in *believing* or *disbelieving* this or that Principle or Doctrine, *but the exercise of our selves in a visible Way of Worship, upon our beliving it to be indispensibly required at our hands, that if we neglect it for Fear or Favour of any Mortal Man, we Sin, and incur divine Wrath*: Yet we would be so understood to extend and justifie the lawfulness of our so meeting to Worship God, as not to contrive, or abet any Contrivance distructive of the Government and Laws of the Land, tending to matters of an external nature, directly, or indirectly; but so far only, as it may refer to Religious matters, and a Life to come, and consequently wholly independent of the secular Affairs of this, wherein we are supposed to Transgress.

Secondly, By Impoſition, Reſtraint, and Perſecution, we don't only mean, the ſtrict requiring of us to believe this to be true, or that to be falſe; and upon refuſal, to incur the Penalties enacted in ſuch Caſes: but by thoſe terms we mean thus much, Any coercive Let or Hindrance to us, from meeting together to perform thoſe Religious Exerciſes, which are according to our Faith and Perſwaſion.

The Queſtion *Stated.*

For Proof of the aforeſaid Tearms thus given, we ſingly ſtate the Queſtion thus.

Whether *Impoſition*, *Reſtraint*, and *Perſecution*, upon perſons for Exerciſing ſuch a *Liberty of Conſcience*, as is before expreſſed, and ſo circumſtantiated, be not to impeach the Honour of God, the Meekneſs of the Chriſtian Religion, the Authority of Scripture, the Priviledge of Nature, the Principles of common Reaſon, the Well-being of Government, and Apprehenſions of the greateſt Perſonages of former and latter Ages.

Firſt, Then we ſay, *That Impoſition*, *Reſtraint*, and *Perſecution*, for matters relating to Conſcience, *directly invade divine Prerogative, and diveſt the Almighty of a Due, proper to none beſides himſelf.* And this we prove by theſe five Particulars.

1. *Firſt*, If we do allow the honor of our Creation, due to God only, and that no other beſides himſelf has endow'd us with thoſe excellent Gifts of *Underſtanding*, *Reaſon*, *Judgment*, and *Faith*; and conſequently, that he only is the Object as well as Author, both of our *Faith*, *Worſhip*, and *Service*; then whoever ſhall interpoſe their Authority, to enact *Faith* and *Worſhip*, in a way that ſeems not to us congruous with what he has diſ-

discover'd to us, to be Faith, and Worship (whose alone *property* it is to do it) or to restrain us from what we are perswaded is *our indispensable duty*, they evidently usurp this *Authority* and invade his incommunicable *Right* of Government over *Conscience*: *For the Inspiration of the Almighty gives Understanding: And Faith is the Gift of God, says the divine Writ.*

2. *Secondly, Such Magisterial determinations carry an evident claim to that infallability*, which *Protestants* have been hitherto so jealous of owning, that to avoid the *Papists*, they have denied it to all, but God himself.

Either they have forsook their old Plea; or if not, we desire to know when, and where they were invested with that divine excellency; and that *Imposition*, *Restraint*, and *Persecution*, were deem'd by God ever the Fruits of his Spirit: However, that it self were not sufficient; for, unless it appears as well to us that they have it, as to them who have it, we cannot believe it upon any convincing Evidence, but by Tradition only; *an Anti-protestant way of believing.*

3. *Thirdly, It enthrones man as King over Conscience, the alone just claim and priviledge of his Creator, whose Thoughts are not as mens Thoughts, but has reserv'd to himself that* Empire, *from all the* Cæsars *on Earth*; for if men, in reference to souls and bodies, things appertaining to this and t'other World, shall be subject to their Fellow-creatures, what follows? but that *Cæsar* (however he got it) has all, Gods share, and his own too; and being Lord of both, *both are* Cæsars, *and nothing Gods.*

4. *Fourthly, It defeats the Work of his Grace, and the invisible Operation of his eternal Spirit, which can alone beget Faith, and is only to be obey'd in, and about Religion and Worship, & attributes mens conformity to outward force and corporal punishments.* A *Faith* subject to as many *revolutions*, as the *Powers* that enact it.

5. *Fifthly* and *lastly, Such persons assume the Judgment of the great Tribunal unto themselves*; for, to whomsoever men are im-

impoſedly or reſtrictively ſubject and accountable in matters of Faith, Worſhip, and Conſcience; in them alone muſt the power of Judgment reſide; but it is equally true, that God ſhall judge all by Jeſus Chriſt, and that no man is ſo accountable to his Fellow-Creatures, as to be impos'd upon, reſtrain'd, or perſecuted, for any matter of Conſcience whatever.

Thus, and in many more particulars, are men accuſtom'd to entrench upon divine *Property*, *to gratifie particular Intereſts in the World* (and at beſt) through a miſguided Apprehenſion, to imagine *they do God good Service*, that where they cannot give Faith, *they will uſe Force*; which kind of Sacrifice is nothing leſs Unreaſonable, then the other is Abominable: *God will not give his honour to another; and him only that ſearches the heart, and tries the reins, it is our duty to aſcribe the Gifts of* Underſtanding *and* Faith, *without which none can pleaſe God.*

CHAP. II.

THE next great evil which attends *External Force* in matters of *Faith* and *Worſhip*, *is no leſs then the overthrow of the whole Chriſtian Religion*, and this we will briefly evidence in theſe four particulars. 1, Firſt, *That there can be nothing more remote from the Nature.* 2. Secondly, *The practice.* 3. Thirdly, *The Promotion.* 4. Fourthly, *The Rewards of it.*

1. Firſt, It is the Priviledge of the Chriſtian Faith above the dark ſuggeſtions of Antient and Modern Superſtitious Traditions, to carry with it a moſt Self-evidencing verity, which ever was ſufficient to proſelite Believers, *without the weak Auxilaries of external power*: The Son of God, *and great Example of the World*, was ſo far from calling his Father's Omnipotency

nipotency in *legions of Angels* to his defence, *that he at once Repeal'd all Acts of force, and defin'd unto us the nature of his Religion* in this one great saying of his, *MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD.* It was ſpiritual, not carnall, acompanied with weapons, as heavenly as its own nature, and deſign'd for the good and ſalvation of the ſoul, and not the injury and deſtruction of the body: no *Goals, Fines, Exils* &c. but *ſound reaſon, cleer truth, and a ſtrict life.* In ſhort, the Chriſtian Religion intreats all, but compels none.

2. Secondly, that *Reſtraint and Perſecution overturn the practiſe of it*; I need go no further then the allow'd *Martyrologies* of ſeveral Ages, of which the *Scriptures* claim a ſhare; begin with *Abel*, go down to *Moſes*, ſo to the *Prophets*, and then to the meek example of *Jeſus Chriſt* himſelf; How patiently devoted was he, to undergo the Contradictions of men? and ſo far from perſecuting any, that he would *not ſo much as revile his Perſecutors*, but pray'd for them; thus liv'd his *Apoſtles*, and the true Chriſtians of the firſt three hundred years: Nor are the famous Stories of our firſt Reformers ſilent in the matter; witneſs the Chriſtian practiſes of the *Waldenſes, Lollards, Huſſites, Lutherans*, and our noble *Martyrs*, who, as became the true followers of Jeſus Chriſt, *enacted and confirm'd their Religion with their own blood, and not with the blood of their Oppoſers.*

3. Thirdly, *Reſtraint and Perſecution obſtructs the promotion of the Chriſtian Religion*; for if ſuch as reſtrain, confeſs themſelves *miſerable ſinners, and altogether imperfect, it* eithers follows, that they never deſire to be better, or that they ſhould incourage ſuch as may be capable of further informing and reforming them; they condemn the Papiſts for encoffening the Scriptures and their Worſhip in an unknown

unknown Tongue, and yet are guilty themſelves of the ſame kind of Fact.

4 Fourthly, *They prevent many of eternal Rewards*; for where any are Religious for fear, and that of men, 'tis ſlaviſh; and the recompence of ſuch Religion is condemnation, not peace: beſides, 'tis man that is ſerv'd, who having no *power*, but what is *temporary*, his reward muſt needs be ſo too; he that impoſes a *duty*, or reſtrains from one, muſt *reward*; but becauſe no man can reward for ſuch Duties, no man can, or ought, to impoſe them, or reſtrain from them. So that we conclude *Impoſition*, *Reſtraint*, and *Perſecution*, are deſtructive of the Chriſtian Religion, in the Nature, Practice, Promotion, and Rewards of it, which are *Eternal*.

CHAP. III.

WE further ſay, *That Impoſition, Reſtraint, and Perſecution are repugnant to the plain Teſtimonies and Precepts of the Scriptures.*

The Inſpiration of the Almighty gives Underſtanding, 1. Job 32. 8.

If no man can believe before he underſtands, and no man can underſtand before he is inſpir'd of God, then are the Impoſitions of men excluded, as Unreaſonable, and their Perſecutions for Non-obedience as Inhumane.

Wo unto them that take counſel, but not of me, 2. Iſa. 30 1.

Wo unto them that make a man an Offender *for a word, and lay a Snare for him that reproveth in the Gate, and turns aſide the Juſt for a thing of nought*, 3. Iſa. 29. 15, 21.

Let the Wheat and the Tares Grow together *until the time of the Harveſt*, or, *end of the World*, 4. Matth. 13. 27, 28, 29.

And

And Jesus call'd them unto him, and said, Ye know that the Princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are greatest, exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so amongst you, 5. *Mat.* 20. 25, 26.

And Jesus answering, said unto them, Render unto Cæsar *the things that are* Cæsars, and unto God the things that are Gods, 6. *Luke* 20. 21, 22, 23, 24, 25.

When his Disciples saw this (that there were Non-conformists then as well as now) *they said, Wilt thou that we command Fire to come down from Heaven and consume them, as* Elisha *did? But he turned*, and rebuked them, *and said, Ye know not what spirit ye are of*; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them, 7. *Luk* 9. 54, 55, 56.

Howbeit, when the Spirit of Truth is come, he shall lead you into all Truth, 8. *John* 16. 8, 13.

But now the Anointing, which ye have received of him, abides in you; *and you need not that any man teach you* (much less impose upon any, or restrain them from what any are perswaded it leads to) *but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is Truth, and is no Lye*, 9. *John* 1. 9, 27.

Dearly Beloved, Avenge not your selves, but rather give place unto Wrath (much less should any be Wrath that are called Christians, where no occasion is given) *Therefore if thine Enemy Hunger, Feed him*; *and if he Thirst, give him Drink: Recompence no man Evil for Evil*, 10. Rom. 12 19, 20, 21.

For though we walk in the flesh (that is in the body, or visible world) *we do not War after the Flesh*; *for the Weapons of our warfare are not Carnal*, 11. 2 Cor. 3. 4, 5. (but Fines and Imprisonments are, and such use not the Apostles Weapons that employ those) for *a Bishop*, 1 Tim. 3. 23. (said *Paul*) *must be of a good behaviour, apt to teach*, no Striker, but be gentle

unto all men, *Patient in Meekneſs, Inſtructing* (not Perſecuting) *thoſe that oppoſe themſelves, if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the acknowledgment of the Truth,* 2 Tim. 2. 24,25.

Laſtly, We ſhall ſubjoyn one Paſſage more, and then no more of this Particular; *Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo unto them,* 12. Matt. 7. 12. Luke 6. 31.

Now upon the whole we ſeriouſly ask, *Whether any ſhould be Impos'd upon, or Reſtrain'd in matters of Faith and Worſhip? Whether ſuch Practices become the Goſpel, or are ſutable to Chriſts Meek Precepts and Suffering Doctrine?* And Laſtly, *Whether thoſe who are herein guilty, do to us,* as they would be done unto by others?

What if any were once ſevere to you? many are unconcern'd in that, who are yet lyable to the Laſh, as if they were not. But if you once thought, the *Impoſition of a Directory Unreaſonable, and a Reſtraint from your Way of Worſhip Unchriſtian,* can you believe that *Liberty of Conſcience* is changed, becauſe the *Parties* in points of Power are? or that the ſame Reaſons do not yet remain in Vindication of an Indulgence for others, that were once Employ'd by you for your ſelves? Surely ſuch Conjectures would argue groſs Weakneſs.

To Conclude, Whether *Perſecutors* (at any time) read the *Scriptures* we know not; but certain we are, *Such practiſe as little of them as may be,* who with ſo much delight reject them, and think it no ſmall acceſſion to their diſcovery of their Loyalty, *to lead us, and our Properties in triumph after them.*

Chap.

CHAP. IV.

WE further say, That *Imposition, Restraint and Persecution are also destructive of the great Priviledg of Nature and Principle of Reason. Of nature in three Instances.*

1. First, If God Almighty has made of one Blood all *Nations*, as himself has declar'd, and that he has given them both Sences *Corporal* and *Intellectual*, to discern things and their differences, so as to assert or deny from Evidences and Reasons proper to each; then where any Enacts the Belief or Disbelief of any thing upon the rest, or Restrains any from the Exercise of their Faith, *to them indispensible*, such *Exalts himself beyond his bounds, Enslaves his Fellow Creatures, Invades their Right of Liberty, and so perverts the whole order of Nature.*

2. Secondly, *Mankind* is hereby rob'd of the use and benefit of that *instinct* of a *Diety*, which is so natural to him, that he can be no more without it, and *be*, then he can be without the most essential Part of himself; For, to what serves that *Divine Principle* in the universallity of *Mankind*, if men be restricted by the Presciptions of some Individuals? But if the excellent Nature of it, *inclines men to God*, not Man; *if the power of Accusing, and Excusing, be committed to it; if the troubled Thoughts, and sad Reflections, of Forlorn and Dying men, make their tendency that a way only*, (as being hopeless of all other Relief and Succour from any external Power or Command) What shall we say? but that such as invallid the Authority of this Heavenly *Instinct* (*as Imposition and Restraint evidently do*) *destroy Nature, or that Priviledge which men are Born with, and to.*

3. *All natural Affection is destroy'd*; for those who have so little Tenderness, as to persecute men that cannot for Conscience sake yield them compliance, manifestly act injuriously to their Fellow-Creatures, and consequently are Enemies to Nature; for Nature being one in all, *such as ruin those who are equally entitled with themselves to Nature, ruin it in them*, as in Liberty, Property, &c. *and so bring the state of Nature to the state of War, the great* Leviathan *of the times, as ignorantly as boldly does assert.*

2. But Secondly, We also prove them Destructive of the noble Principle of Reason, and that in these eight Particulars.

1. *In that those who Impose or Restrain are uncertain of the truth, and justifiableness of their Actions in either of this*, their own Discourses and Confessions are *pregnant Instances*, where they tell us, that *They do not pretend to be infallible, only they humbly conceive 'tis thus, or it is not.*

2. Since then they are uncertain and fallible, how can they impose upon, or restrain others, whom they are so far from assuring, as they are not able to do so much for themselves: *what is this, but to impose an Uncertain Faith upon Certain Penalties?*

3. As he that Acts Doubtfully is Damn'd, so Faith in all Acts of Religion is necessary: Now in order to *Believe*, we must first *Will*; to *Will*, we must first *Judge*; to *Judge* any thing, we *must* first *understand*; if then we cannot be said to *Understand* any thing against our *Understanding*; no more can we *Judge*, *Will*, and *Believe* against our *Understanding*: And if the Doubter be Damn'd, what must he be that conforms directly against his *Judgment* and *Belief*, and they likewise that require it from him? In short, that *Man cannot be said to have any Religion*, that *takes it by another mans choice, not his own.*

4. Where

4. Where men are limitted in matters of Religion, there the Rewards, which are entail'd on the free acts of men, are quite overthrown; and such as superceed that *Grand Charter* of Liberty of Conscience, frustrate all hopes of Recompence *by rendring the Actions of men unavoidable*: But those think perhaps, *They do not destroy all Freedom, because they use so much of their own.*

5. Fifthly, They subvert all true *Religion*; for where men believe, not because it is True, but because they are required to do so; there they will unbelieve, not because 'tis False, but so commanded by their Superiors, whose *Authority*, their *Interest*, and *Security*, obliege them rather to obey, then dispute.

6. Sixthly, They *Delude*, or rather *Compel* people out of their eternal *Rewards*; for where men are commanded to act in reference to *Religion*, and can neither be secured of their *Rewards*, not yet sav'd harmless from *Punishments*; their so acting and believing dispriviledges them forever of that Recompence, which is provided for the Faithful.

7. Seventhly, Men have their Liberty and Choice in external matters; *they are not compelled to Marry this Person, to Converse with that, to Buy here, to Eat there, nor to Sleep yonder*; Yet if men had Power to Impose or Restrain in any thing, one would think it should be in such exteriour *matters*; but that this *Liberty* should be Unquestion'd, and that of the *Mind* Destroy'd issues here, *that it does not Unbruit us, but Unman us*; for take away *Understanding, Reason, Judgment, and Faith*, and like *Nebuchadnezar*, let us go Graze with the Beasts of the Field.

8 Eighthly and lastly, That *which most of all blackens the Business is* PERSECUTION; for though it is very *unreasonable* to require *Faith*, where *men* cannot chuse but *doubt*,

yet

yet after all, to punish them for Disobedience, 'tis Cruelty in the abstract; for we demand, *Shall men Suffer for not doing what they cannot do?* Must they be persecuted here if they do not go against their Consciences, and punished hereafter if they do? But neither is this all; for that part that is yet most unreasonable, and that gives the clearest sight of *Persecution*, is still behind, namely, *The Monstrous Arguments they have to Convince an Heretick with*: Not those of old, as Spirituall as the Christian Religion, *which were to Admonish, Warn, and finally to reject*; but such as were imploy'd by the *Persecuting Jews* and *Heathens*, against the great *Example* of the World, and such as follow'd him; and by the inhumane *Papists* against our first Reformers, as *Clubbs, Staves, Stocks, Pillories, Prisons, Dungeons, Exiles, &c.* in a word, *Ruin to whole Families, as if it were not so much their Design to Convince the Soul, as to Destroy the Body.*

To Conclude, There ought to be an *Adequation* and Resemblance betwixt all *Ends*, and the means to them, but in this case there can be none imaginable; *the End is the conformity of our Judgments and Understandings to the acts of such as require it*; the Means are *Fines and Imprisonments* (*and bloody Knocks to boot.*

Now what Proportion or Assimulation these bear, let the *Sober judge*: The Understanding can never be convinc'd, nor properly submit, but by such Arguments, *as are rational, perswasive and sutable to its own Nature*; something that can *Resolve its Doubts, Answer its Objections, Enervate its Propertions*; but to imagine *those barbarous Newgate Instruments of Clubbs, Fines, Prisons, &c. with that whole Troop of external and dumb Materials of Force should be fit Arguments to convince the* Understanding, *scatter its scruples, and finally, convert it to their Religion*, is altogether irrational, cruel, and impossible. Force may make an Hypocrite; *'tis Faith grounded upon Knowledge and consent that*

makes

makes a Christian. And to Conclude, As we can never betray the Honour of our Conformity (only due to Truth) by a base and timorous Hypocrisie, to any external Violence under Heaven; so must we needs say, *Unreasonable are those* Imposers, *who secure not the* Imposed, *or* Restrained, *from what may occur to them, upon their account; and most inhumane are those* Persecutors, *that punish men for not obeying them, though to their utter ruin.*

CHAP. V.

WE next urge, That *Force*, in matters relating to *Conscience, carry a plain Contradiction to* Government, *in the Nature, Execution, and End of it.*

By Government we understand, *an external Order of Justice, or the right and prudent Discipline of any Society, by just Laws, either in the Relaxation, or Execution of them.*

1. First, It carries a Contradiction to *Government* in the *Nature* of it, which is *Justice*, and that in three Respects.

1. It is the first Lesson that great *Synteresis*, so much renown'd by *Philosophers* and *Civillians*, learns Mankind, *to do as he would be done to*, since he that gives what he would not take, or takes what he would not give, only shews care for himself; but neither kindness nor *Justice* for another.

2. Secondly, *The just Nature of Government Lies in a fair and equal Retrebution*; But what can be more unequal then that men should be rated *more then their Proportion*, to answer the Necessities of Government, and yet that they should not only receive *no Protection from it*, but by it be disseiz'd of their dear *Liberties* and *Properties*; we say to be compelled to pay that Power, that exalts it self to ruin those

those that pay it, or that any should be required to enrich those that ruin them, is hard, and unequal, and therefore contrary to the just Nature of Government. *If we must be Contributaries to the maintenance of it, we are entituled to a protection from it.*

3. Thirdly, *It is the Justice of Government to proportion Penalties to the Crime committed.* Now granting our Dissent to be a Fault, yet the infliction of a Corporal or External Punishment, for a meer mental Error (and that not Voluntarily too) is Unreasonable and Inadequate, as well as against particular directions of the *Scriptures*, *Tit.* 3. 9,10,11. For as Corporal Penalties cannot convince the *Understanding*; so neither can they be commensurate Punishments, for faults purely *Intellectual*: And for the *Government* of this World to intermeddle with what belongs to the *Government of Another*, and which can have no ill Aspect, or Influence upon it, *shews more of Invasion then Right and Justice.*

2. Secondly, *It carries a Contradiction to Government in the Execution of it, which is Prudence; and that in these Instances.*

The state of the Case is this, That there is no *Republique* so great, no *Empire* so vast, but the Laws of them are Resolvable into these two *Series* or *Heads*, *Of Laws Fundamental, which are indispensible and immutable*; *And Laws Superficial, which are temporary and alterable:* And as it is *Justice* and *Prudence* to be Punctual in the Execution of the former; so by Circumstances it may be neither, to Execute the latter, *they being suited to the present Conveniency and Emergency of State*; as the Prohibiting of Cattle out of *Ireland* was judg'd of advantage to the *Farmers* of *England*, yet a *Murrin* would make it the good of the whole, that the *Law* should be broke, or at least the Execution of it suspended. That the Law

of

of *Reſtraint* in point of Conſcience is of this number; we may further manifeſt, *and the imprudence of thinking otherwiſe*: For, firſt, if the ſaying were as true as 'tis falſe; *No Biſhop, No King*, (which admits of various readings; *As no decimating Clergy, or no Perſecution, no King*, we ſhould be as ſilent, as ſome would have us: but the confidence of their Aſſertion, and the impollicy of ſuch as believe it, makes us to ſay, that a greater injury cannot be done to the preſent Government. For if ſuch Laws and Eſtabliſhments are fundamental; they are as immutable as mankind it ſelf; but that they are as alterable as the Conjectures and Opinions of Governors have been, is evident; *ſince the ſame fundamental indiſpenſable Laws and Politicy of theſe Kingdoms have ſtill remain'd through all varity of oppoſite Ruling Opinions and Jugdments*, and disjoynt from them all. Therefore to admit ſuch a fixation to temporary Laws, muſt needs be highly imprudent, and diſtructive of the eſſential parts of the Government of theſe Countries.

2. Secondly, That ſince there has been a time of connivance, and that with no ill ſucceſs to publick Affairs, it cannot be prudence to diſcontinue it, unleſs it was imprudence before to give it, *and ſuch little deſerve it that think ſo.*

3. Thirdly, Diſſenters not being conſcious to themſelves of any juſt Forfeiture of that Favour, are as well griev'd in their Reſentments of this Alteration, as the contrary did obliege them to very greatefull Acknowledgments.

4. Fourthly, this muſt be done to gratifie all, or the greateſt Part, or but ſome few only; it is a demonſtration all are not pleaſed with it; that the greateſt Number is not, *the empty publick Auditories will ſpeak*: In ſhort, how ſhould either be, when ſix Parties are ſacrificed to the

seventh; that this cannot be Prudence, *common Maxims* and *Observations* prove.

5. Fifthly, It strikes fatally at *Protestant-sincerity*; for will the *Papists* say, *Did Protestants exclaim against us, for Persecutors, and are they now the Men themselves? Was it an instance of Weakness in our Religion, and is't become a demonstration in theirs? Have they transmuted it from Antichristian in us, to Christian in themselves? Let Persecutors answer.*

6. Sixthly, *It is not only an Example, but an incentive to the* Romanists, *to Persecute the Reformed Religion abroad*; for when they see their Actions *(once void of all Excuse)* now defended by the Example of *Protestants*, that once accus'd them (but now themselves) doubtless they will revive their *Cruelty*.

7. Seventhly, *It overturns the very ground of the* Protestants *Retreat from* Rome; for if men must be restrain'd upon pretended prudential Considerations, from the Exercise of their Conscience in *England*; why not the same in *France, Holland, Germany, Constantinople, &c.* where matters of State may equally be pleaded? This makes Religion, State-policy; and Faith and Worship, subservient to the Humors and Interests of Superiors: Such Doctrine would have prevented our Ancestors Retreat; and We wish it be not the beginning of a Back-march; for Some think it shrewdly to be suspected, where *Religion* is suited to the *Government*, and *Conscience to its conveniency*.

8. Eightly, *Vice* is incourag'd; for if *Licentious Persons* see Men of Vertue molested for Assembling with a Religious Purpose to Reverence and Worship God, and that are otherwise most serviceable to the Common-Wealth, they may and will infer, it is better for them to be as they are, since not to be *demure*, as they call it, is half way to that kind of Accomplishment, which procures Preferment.

9.

9. Ninthly, For such persons as are so poor spirited as to truckle under such Restraints: What Conquest is there over them? that before were Conscientious men, and now Hypocrites: Who so forward to be aveng'd of them, that brought this guilt upon them, as they themselves? And how can the *Imposers* be secure of their Friendship, whom they have taught to change with the Times?

10. Tenthly, Such Laws are so far from benefitting the Country, that the Execution of them will be the assured ruin of it, in the Revenues, and consequently in the Power of it; For where there is a decay of Families, there will be of Trade; so of Wealth, and in the end of Strength and Power; and if both kinds of Relief fail; *Men, the Prop of Republiques*; *Money, the Stay of Monarchies*; *this as requiring Mercenaries, that as needing* Freemen (farewell the interest of *England*; 'tis true, the Priests get (though that's but for a time) *but the King and People lose*; as the event will shew.

11. Eleventhly, It ever was the Prudence of wise Magistrates to Obliege their People: But what comes shorter of it then Persecution? What's dearer to them then the Liberty of their Conscience? What, cannot they better spare then it? Their Peace consists in the enjoyment of it: And he that by Compliance has lost it, carries his Penalty with him, and it is his own Prison. Surely such Practices must render the Government Uneasie, and beget a great Disrespect to the Governours, in the Hearts of the People.

12. Twelfthly, But that which concludes our *prudential* part, shall be this, That after all their Pains and Goodwill to stretch men to their measure, they never will be able to accomplish their End: And if he be an unwise man, that provides Means where he designs no End, how neer is he

kin to him that proposes an End inobtainable. Experience has told us, 1. How *Invective* it has made the *Impos'd*. 2. What *Distractions* have insued such *Attempts*. 3. What *Reproach* has followed to the *Christian Religion*, when the Professors of it have us'd a coercive Power upon Conscience. And lastly, That *Force* never yet made, either a *Good Christian* or a *Good Subject*.

3. Thirdly and Lastly, Since the proceedings we argue against, are prov'd so destructive to the Justice and Prudence of Government, we ought the less to wonder that they should hold the same malignity against the End of it, which is *Felicity*, since the Wonder would be to find it otherwise; and this is evident from these three brief Considerations.

1. First, *Peace* the End of War and Government, and its great Happiness too) has been, is, and yet will be broken by the frequent Tumultuary Disturbances, that ensue the Disquieting our Meetings, and the Estreeting Fines upon our Goods and Estates. And what these things may issue in, concerneth the Civil Magistrate to consider.

2. Secondly, *Plenty* (another great End of Government) will be converted into *Poverty* by the Destruction of so many thousand Families as refuse Compliance and Conformity, and that not only to the *Sufferers*, but influentially to all the *rest*; a Demonstration of which we have in all those Places where the late Act has been any thing considerably put in Execution. Besides how great Provocation such Incharity and cruel Usage, as stripping *Widdows, Fatherless, and Poor, of their very Necessaries for humane Life, meerly upon an account of Faith or Worship, must needs be to the Just and Righteous Lord of Heaven and Earth*; Scriptures, and plenty of other Stories plainly shew us.

3.

3. Thirdly, *Unity* (not the leaſt but greateſt End of Government is loſt) for by ſeeking an Unity of Opinion (by the wayes intended) the Unity requiſit to uphold us, as a *civil Society*, will be quite deſtroy'd: And ſuch as relinquiſh *that* to get the *other* (beſides that they are Unwiſe) *will infallibly loſe both in the end.*

In ſhort, We ſay, that 'tis unreaſonable we ſhould not be entertain'd as men, becauſe ſome think we are not as Good *Chriſtians* as they pretend to wiſh us; or that we ſhould be depriv'd of our *Liberties* and *Properties*, who never broke the Laws that gave them to us: What can be harder, then to take that from us by a Law, which the great indulgence and ſolicitude of our Anceſtors took ſo much pains to intail upon us by Law; An. 18. *Ed.* 3. ſtat. 3. alſo ſtat. 20 *Ed.* 3 cap: 1. again, *Peition of Right*, An. 3. *Car.* and more fully in *Magna Charta*; further peruſe 37 *Ed.* 5. cap. 8. 28. 42 *Ed.* 3. cap. 3. 28 *Hen* cap. 7.

And we are perſwaded, that no Temporary Subſequential Law whatever, to our Fundamental Rights (as this of *Force* on *Conſcience* is) can invalid ſo eſſential a part of the *Government*, as an *Engliſh Liberty* and *Property*: Nor that it's in the power of any on Earth, to deprive us of them, till we have firſt done it our ſelves, *by ſuch enormous Facts, as thoſe very Laws prohibit*, and make our Forfeiture of that benefit, we ſhould otherwiſe receive by them; for theſe being ſuch *Cardinal* and *Fundamental Points of Engliſh Law-Doctrine*, individually, and by the collective *Body* of people agreed to; and on which as the moſt ſolid Baſis, our *Secondary Legiſlative Power*, as well as Executive is built; it ſeems moſt rational, that the *Superſtructure* cannot quarrel or invalid its own Foundation, without manifeſtly endangering its own ſecurity, the *Effect* is ever leſs noble then the *Cauſe*, the *Gift* then the *Giver*, and the *Superſtructure* then the *Foundation*.

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The ſingle *Queſtion*, to be reſolved in the Caſe, briefly will be this, *Whether any viſible Authority (being founded in its primitive Inſtitution upon thoſe Fundamental Laws, that inviolably preſerve the people in all their juſt Rights and Priviledges) may invalidate all, or any of the ſaid Laws, without an implicit ſhaking of its own Foundation, and a clear overthrow of its own Conſtitution of Government, and ſo reduce them to their* Statu quo prius, *or firſt Principles: The reſolution is every mans, at his own pleaſure. Read* Hen. 3 9. 14, 29. 25 E. 3. Cook *Inſtit.* 2. 9. 50, 51.

Thoſe who intend us no Share or Intereſt in the Laws of *England*, as they relate to civil Matters, unleſs we correſpond with them in Points of Faith and Worſhip, muſt do two things: Firſt, It will lie heavy upon their parts to prove, *That the Ancient Compact and Original of our Laws*, carries that *Proviſo* with it; elſe we are manifeſtly diſſeized of our *Free-Cuſtoms*.

Secondly, They are to prove the Reaſonableneſs of ſuch Proceedings to our Underſtandings, that we may not be concluded by a Law, we know not how to underſtand; for if I take the matter rightly (as I think I do) we muſt not Buy or Sell unleſs of this or of that Perſwaſion in Religion; not conſidering civil Society was in the World before the *Proteſtant Profeſſion*; *Men*, as ſuch, and in Affairs peculiarly relative of them, in an external and civil capacity, have ſubſiſted many Ages, under great variety of Religious Apprehenſions; and therefore not ſo dependant on them as to receive any variation or Revolution with them. What ſhall we ſay then? but that ſome will not that we ſhould *Live, Breath, and Commerce as men*, becauſe we are not ſuch modeli'd *Chriſtians* as they coercively would have us; they might with as much juſtice and reputation to themſelves forbid us to look or ſee, unleſs our Eyes were *Grey, Black, Brown, Blew*,

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or ſome one Colour beſt ſuiting theirs: For not to be able to give us *Faith*, or ſave our Conſciences harmleſs, and yet to perſecute us for refuſing Conformity, is intollerable hard meaſure.

In ſhort, That coercive way of bringing al' men to their height of Perſwaſion, muſt ei her ariſe from *Exorbitant Zeal* and *Superſtition*; or from a *conſciouſneſs* of *Error* and *Defect*, which is unwilling any thing more ſincere, and reformed ſhould take place; being of that *Cardinals* mind, who therefore would not hearken to a Reformation, at the ſitting of the Counſel of *Trent*; becauſe he would not ſo f r approve the Reformers *Judgment* (*for having once condeſcended to their Apprehenſi ns, he thought 'twould forever inſlave them to their Sence*) though otherwiſe he ſaw as much as any man, the grand neceſſity of a Reformation, both of the *Roman Doctrine* and *Converſation*.

Some grand Objections in the way muſt be Conſidered.

Objection I. *But you are a People that meet with Deſigns to Diſſaffect the People, and to ruin the Government.*

Anſw. A *Surmiſe* is no *Certainty*, neither is *A may be*, or *Conjecture, any Proof:* That from the firſt we have behaved our ſelves inoffenſively is a Demonſtration, that our Meetings are open, where all may hear our Matter, and have liberty to object or diſcuſe any point, is notorious. *Ignorant Calumnies are Sandy Foundations to build ſo high a Charge upon*: Let us Fairly be heard in a publique Conference, how far we can juſtifie our Principles from being deſervedly ſuſpected of Se-

The single *Question*, to be resolved in the Case, briefly will be this, *Whether any visible Authority (being founded in its primitive Institution upon those Fundamental Laws, that inviolably preserve the people in all their just Rights and Priviledges) may invalidate all, or any of the said Laws, without an implicit shaking of its own Foundation, and a clear overthrow of its own Constitution of Government, and so reduce them to their* Statu quo prius, *or first Principles: The resolution is every mans, at his own pleasure. Read* Hen. 3 9. 14, 29. 25 E. 3. Cook *Instit.* 2. 9. 50, 51.

Those who intend us no Share or Interest in the Laws of *England*, as they relate to civil Matters, unless we correspond with them in Points of Faith and Worship, must do two things: First, It will lie heavy upon their parts to prove, *That the Ancient Compact and Original of our Laws*, carries that *Proviso* with it; else we are manifestly disseized of our *Free-Customs*.

Secondly, They are to prove the Reasonableness of such Proceedings to our Understandings, that we may not be concluded by a Law, we know not how to understand; for if I take the matter rightly (as I think I do) we must not Buy or Sell unless of this or of that Perswasion in Religion; not considering civil Society was in the World before the *Protestant Profession*; *Men*, as such, and in Affairs peculiarly relative of them, in an external and civil capacity, have subsisted many Ages, under great variety of Religious Apprehensions; and therefore not so dependant on them as to receive any variation or Revolution with them. What shall we say then? but that some will not that we should *Live, Breath, and Commerce as men*, because we are not such modell'd *Christians* as they coercively would have us; they might with as much justice and reputation to themselves forbid us to look or see, unless our Eyes were *Grey, Black, Brown, Blew*,

or

or ſome one Colour beſt ſuiting theirs: For not to be able to give us *Faith*, or ſave our Conſciences harmleſs, and yet to perſecute us for refuſing Conformity, is intollerable hard meaſure.

In ſhort, That coercive way of bringing all men to their height of Perſwaſion, muſt either ariſe from *Exorbitant Zeal* and *Superſtition*; or from a *conſciouſneſs* of *Error* and *Defect*, which is unwilling any thing more ſincere, and reformed ſhould take place; being of that *Cardinals* mind, who therefore would not hearken to a Reformation, at the ſitting of the Counſel of *Trent*; becauſe he would not ſo far approve the Reformers *Judgment* (*for having once condeſcended to their Apprehenſions, he thought 'twould forever inſlave them to their Sence*) though otherwiſe he ſaw as much as any man, the grand neceſſity of a Reformation, both of the *Roman Doctrine* and *Converſation*.

Some grand Objections in the way muſt be Conſidered.

Objection I. *But you are a People that meet with Deſigns to Diſſaffect the People, and to ruin the Government.*

Anſw. A *Surmiſe* is no *Certainty*, neither is *A may be*, or *Conjecture, any Proof:* That from the firſt we have behaved our ſelves inoffenſively is a Demonſtration, that our Meetings are open, where all may hear our Matter, and have liberty to object or diſcuſs any point, is notorious. *Ignorant Calumnies are Sandy Foundations to build ſo high a Charge upon*: Let us Fairly be heard in a publique Conference, how far we can juſtifie our Principles from being deſervedly ſuſpected of Se-

Sedition or Disloyalty, and not over-run us with meer Suppositions. We declare our readiness to obey the Ordinance of man, which is only relative of Humane or Civil Matters, and not Points of Faith, or Practice of Worship: But if *Accusations* must stand for *Proofs*, we shall take it for granted, that we must stand for *Criminals*; but our Satisfaction will be, that we shall not deserve it otherwise then as prejudice seeks to tradue us.

Object. 2. *But you strike at the Doctrine, at least the Discipline of the Church, and consequently are Heretiks.*

Answ. This Story is as old as the Reformation; if we must be objected against out of pure *Reputation*, let it be in some other matter then what the *Papists objected against the first Protestants*; otherwise you do but hit your selves in aiming at us: *To say you are in the Right, but we are in the Wrong*, is but a meer begging of the Question; for doubtless the *Papists* said the same to you, and all that you can say to us: Your best Plea was, *Conscience* upon *Principles*, the most evident and rational to you: Do not we the like? What if you think our *Reasons* thick, and our ground of *Separation* mistaken? Did not the *Papists* harbour the same *Thoughts* of you? You perswaded as few of them as we of you: Were you therefore in the Wrong? No more are we: It was not what they thought of you, or enacted against you, that concluded you: And why should your Apprehensions conclude us? If you have the way of giving Faith beyond what they had, and have the faculty of Perswasion, evidence as much; but if you are as destitute of both, as they were to you; why should *Fines* and *Prisons*, once us'd by *them* against you, *and by you exclaimed against, as Unchristian Wayes of Reclaiming Hereticks* (supposing your selves to be such) be employ'

employ'd by you as Rational, Christian, and Convincing upon us? To say we deserve them more, is to suppose your selves in the Right, and we in the Wrong, which proves nothing. Besides, the Question is not barely this, Whether *Hereticks*, or no *Hereticks*? but whether an *Heretick should be Persecuted into a disclaining of his Error*? Your old Arguments run thus, as I well remember.

1. *Error is a Mistake in the Understanding.*

2. *This is for want of a better Illumination.*

3. *This Error can never be dislodged, but by Reason and Perswasion; as what are most suitable to the Intellect of man.*

4. *Fines, Goals, Exiles, Gibbits, &c. are no Convincing Arguments to the most erring Understanding in the World, being slavish and brutish.*

5. *This way of Force makes, instead of an honest Dissenter, but an Hypocritical Conformist; then whom nothing is more detestable to God and man.*

This being the Protestants Plea, we are not to be disliked by *Protestants*, for following their own avowed *Maxims.* and *Axioms of Conscience, in defence of its own Liberty.*

In short, Either allow separation upon the single Principle of, *My Conscience owns this*, or *disowns that*; or never dwell in that Building, which knew no better Foundation (indeed good enough) but accusing *your Fore-fathers of Schism, and Heresie, return to the* Romish *Church.* What shorts of this can any say to an *Anti-liberty-of-Conscience-Protestant.*

Object. 3. *But at this rate ye may pretend to cut our Throats, and do all manner of savage Acts.*

Answ. Though the Objection be frequent, yet it is as fouly ridiculous. We are pleading only for such a *Liberty of Conscience*, as preserves the Nation in *Peace*, *Trade*, and *Commerce*; and would not exempt any man, or party of men, from not keeping those excellent Laws, that tend to Sober, Just, and Industrious Living: *It is a Jesuitical Morral, To Kill a man before he is born*; First, to suspect him of an Evil Design, and then Kill him to prevent it.

Object. 4. *But do not you see what has been the end of this Seperation? Wars, and Revolutions, and Danger to Government; witness our late Troubles.*

Ans. We see none of all this, but are able to make it appear, that the true cause of all that *perplext Disturbance*, which was amongst the *Homousians* and *Arrians* of old, and amongst us of later years (as well as what has modernly attended our Neighbouring Countries) took its first rise from a narrowness of spirit, *in not Tollerating others to live the Free-men God made them, in External Matters upon the Earth*, meerly upon some difference in Religion.

And were there once but an hearty *Tolleration* establisht, 'twould be a Demonstration of the truth of this Assertion On this Ground, *Empire* stands safe; on the other, it seems more uncertain.

But these are only the popular *Devices* of some, to traduce honest Men, and their Principles; whose *lazy Life*, and *intollerable Averice* become question'd, by a Tolleration of people better inclin'd.

Object. 5. *But what need you take this pains to prove Liberty of Conscience Reasonable and Necessary, when none questions it;*

all

all that is required is, That you meet but four more then your own Families; and can you not be contended with that? Your Diſobedience to a Law, ſo favourable brings ſuffering upon you.

Anſw. Here is no need of anſwering the former part of the Objection; 'Tis too apparent throughout the Land, that *Liberty of Conſcience*, as we have ſtated it, has been ſeverely proſecuted, and therefore not ſo franckly injoyned: The latter part I anſwer thus, If the words *lawful* and *unlawful*, may bear their ſignification from the nature of the things they ſtand for, then we conceive *that a Meeting of Four Thouſand is no more Unlawful*, then a Meeting of Four; for *Number ſingly conſider'd criminates no Aſſembly*: but the reaſon of their Aſſembling; the poſture in which; and the Matter tranſacted, with the Conſequences thereof.

Now if thoſe things are taken for granted, to be things diſpenſible (*as appears by the allowance of four beſides every Family*) certainly the *number* can never render it *Unlawful*; ſo that the Queſtion will be this, *Whether if Four met to Worſhip God, be an Allowable Metting; Four Thouſand met with the ſame Deſign be not an allowable Meeting?*

It is ſo plain a Caſe, that the Matter in the Queſtion reſolves it.

Object. 6 *But the Law forbids it.*

Anſw. If the Enacting *any-thing* can make *it* lawful, we have done; but if an Act ſo made by the *Papiſts* againſt *Proteſtants* was never eſteem'd ſo by a true *Proteſtant*; and if the nature of the matter will not bear it; and laſtly, that we are as much commanded by God to meet *Four Thouſand* as *Four*; we muſt deſire to be excuſed, if we forbear not the aſſembling of our ſelves together, as the manner of ſome is.

Object. 7. *But the reason of the prohibition of the number is* (for you see they allow all that can be said to Four Thousand to be said to the Family and Four) *that Tumults may arise, and Plots may be made, and the like Inconveniences happen to the Government.*

Answ. Great Assemblies are so far from being injurious, that they are the most inoffensive. For, First, They are *open*, exposed to the view of all, which of all things *Plotters are the sheyest of*; but how fair an Opertunity 'twere, for men so principled, to do it in those allowed Meetings of but four besides the Family, is easie to guess, when we consider, that *few make the best and closest Council*; *and next, that such an Assembly is the most private and clandestine, and so fitted for Mischief and Surprize.*

Secondly, Such Assemblies, are not only publick and large, but they are frequented, as well by those that are not of their way, as of their own; from whence it follows, that we have the greatest reason to be cautious and wise in our Behaviour; *since the more there be at our Meetings, the more Witnesses are against us, if we should say or act any thing that may be prejuditial to the Government,*

Lastly, For these several years none could ever *observe* such an ill *Use* made of that *Freedom*, or such wicked *Designs* to follow such Assemblies; and therefore it is high Incharity to proceed so severely upon meer *Suppositions.*

To this we shall add several Authorities and Testimonies, for further confirmation of our sense of the matter, and to let *Imposers* see, that we are not the only *Persons*, who have impleaded Persecution, and justified *Liberty of Conscience*, as *Christian* and *Rational.*

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

A Brief Collection of the Sence and Practice of the *Greatest, Wiſeſt, and Learnedſt Common-Wealths, Kingdoms,* and *particular Perſons* of their times, concerning *Force upon Conſcience.*

1. Firſt, Though the *Jews* above all people had the moſt to ſay for *Impoſition* and *Reſtraint* within their own Dominions, having their Religion inſtituted by ſo many ſignal Proofs of Divine Original, it being delivered to them by the Hand of God Himſelf; yet ſuch was their Indulgence to *Diſſenters*, that if they held the common receiv'd *Noachical Principles* tending to the acknowledging of *one God*, and a *juſt Life*, they had the Free Exerciſe of their diſtinct Modes, or Wayes of Worſhip, which were numerous. Of this their own *Rabbies* are Witneſſes, and *Grotius* out of them.

2. Secondly, The *Romans* themſelves, as ſtrict as they were, not only had Thirty Thouſand *Godds* (if *Varro* may be credited) but almoſt every Family of any note, had its diſtinct *Sacra*, or peculiar Way of Worſhip.

3. Thirdly, It was the ſence of that Grave, exemplary Common-wealths-man, *Cato*, in *Saluſt*, that among other things which ruin any Government, *want of Freedom of Speech*, or mens being oblieg'd to humor Times, *is a great one*; which we find made good by the *Flowrentine Republique*, as *Guiccear-dine* relates.

4. Fourthly, *Livy* tells us, It was a Wonder that *Hannibals* Army, conſiſting of *divers Nations*, *divers Humors*

differing,

differing Habits, contrary Religions, various Languages, should live 13 years from their own Country under his Command without so much as once mutining either against their General, or among themselves. But what *Livy* relates for a Wonder, *that ingenious Marquess, Virgillio Malvetzy*, gives the reason of, namely, *That the difference of their Opinions, Tongues, and Customs, was the reason of their Preservation and Conquest*; For, said he, 'Twas impossible so many contrary Spirits should Combine, and if any should have done it, 'twas in the *Generals* power to make the greater Party by his equal hand; they owing him more of Reverence, then they did of Affection to one another: This, says he, some impute to *Hannibal*; but how great so ever he was, I give it to the variety of Humors in the Army. For, (adds he) Romes *Army was ever less given to Mutining, when joyned with the Provincial Auxilaries, then when intirely Roman*; thus much and more, in his publique Discourses upon *Cornelius Tacitus*.

5. *Fifthly*, The same, best *Statists* of his time, *C. Tacitus*, tells us in the Case of *Cremtius*, That it had been the interest of *Tiberius*, not to have punished him, in as much as Curiosity is begotten by Restriction of Liberty to Write or Speak, which never mist of Proselites.

6. *Sixthly*, *Just. Martin*. I will forbear to quote, in less then this, two whole Apollogies, dedicated to *Adrian* and *Antonius Pius*, as I take it.

7. *Seventhly*, *Tertullian ad scapulum*, that learned and judicious *Apollogist*, plainly tells us, *That 'tis not the Property of Religion to Compel or Persecute for Religion*; *she* should be accepted for her *Self*, not for *Force*; that being a poor and beggarly one, that has no better Arguments to Convince; and a manifest Evidence of her Superstition and Falshood,

8.

8. *Eightly*, Of this we take the nine Moneths Reign of the Emperor *Jovianus* to be an excellent Demonstration, whose great Wisdom, and admirable Prudence in granting Tolleration (expresly saying, *He would have none molested for the Exercise of their Religious Worship*) Calm'd the impestious Storms of Dissention betwixt *Homousians* and *Arrians*; and reduc'd the whole Empire, being agitated with all kind of Commotions during the Reign of *Constantine*, *Constantius*, and *Julian*, to a wonderful Serenity and Peace, as *Socrates Scholasticus* affirms.

9. *Ninthly*, That little Kingdom of *Ægypt* had no less then Forty Thousand Persons retir'd to their private and seperate Wayes of Worship, as *Eusebius* out of *Philo Judeus*, and *Josephus* relates.

10. *Tenthly*, And here let me bring in honest *Chaucer*, whose Matter (and not his Poetry) heartily affects me: 'twas in a time when *Priests* were as rich, and lofty as they are now, and Causes of Evil alike.

a The Primative State of things observed by a Poet, more then 300. year old; by which the Clergy may *read* their own Apostacy and Character.

a *The time was once, and may return again;*
(for oft may happen that hath been before)
When Shepherds had none Inheritance,
nor of Land, *nor* Fee *in* sufferance,
But what might arise of the bare Sheep,
(were it more or less) which they did keep;
Well ywis was it with Shepherds tho:
nought having nought fear'd they to forgo;
For PAN *(God) himself was their* Inheritance,
and little *them serv'd for their Maintenance;*
The Shepherds God so well them guided,
that of nought were they unprovided;

Butter

(b) *Butter enough, Honey, Milk, and Whay,*
and their Flock Fleeces them to array:
But Tract of Time, *and long* Prosperity,
(that Nurse of Vice, this of Insolency*)*
Lulled the Shepherds in such security,
that not content with Loyal Obeysance,
Some gan to gap for greedy Governance:
and match themselves with mighty Potentates,

(b) Time and Prosperity corrupted them, *and* then they grew States-men.

(c) Lovers *of* lordships, *and* troublers *of* states;
then gan Shepherds Swains to look aloft,
And leave to live hard, and learn to lig soft;
though under colour of Shepherds some while,
There crept in Wolves, *full of fraud and guile,*
that often devour'd their own Sheep,
And often the *Shepherd* that did them keep.

(c) 'Twas now they began to Persecute; they hated any that were more devout then themselves: Devotion was counted Disaffection; Religious Assemblies, Conventicles; primitive spirited *Christians*, Upstart Hereticks; thus the Tragedy began, *Cain* slaying *Abel* about Religion.

(d) *This was the first source of the Shepherds sorrow,*
that nor will be quit with Bale, nor borrw.

(d) He truly maketh their Averice the cause of their Degeneration; for 'tis the Root of all Evil.

11. Who knows not that our first *Reformers* were great *Champions* for *Liberty of Conscience*; as *Wicklif* in his *Remonstration to the Parliament*; the *Albigences* to *Lewis* the 11th and 12th of *France*; *Luther* to the several *Dyets* under *Fredrick* and *Charles* the 5th; *Calvin* to *Francis* the first; and many of our *English* Martyrs, as the poor *Plowman's* Famous *Complaint*, in *Foxes Martyralogy*, &c.

12.

12. The preſent Affairs of *Germany*, plainly tells us, That Tolleration is the preſervation of their ſtates; the contrary having formerly almoſt quite waſted them.

13. The ſame in *France*: Who can be ſo ignorant of their Story, as not to know that the timely *Indulgence* of *Henry* the forth, and the diſcreet *Tollerat on* of *Richlieu* and *Mazarin* ſaved that Kingdom from being ruin'd both by the *Spaniards*; *and one another.*

14. *Holland*, then which, what place is there ſo improved in Wealth, Trade and Power, *chiefly owes it to her Indulgence in matters of Faith and Worſhip.*

15. Among the very *Mahumetans* of *Turkey* and *Perſia*, what variety of *Opinions*, yet what *Unity* and *Concord* is there: we mean in matters of a Civil Importance.

16. It was the Opinion of that great Maſter of the ſentences, *Dominicus a Soto*, *That every man had a Natural Right to inſtruct others in things that are Good*, *And he may teach the Goſpel Truths alſo*; *but cannot compel any to believe them*, *he may Explain them*; *and to this* (ſays he) *every Man has a Right*, as in his 4th Sentence, Diſt. 5. Art. 10. Pag. 115. 7.

17. *Strifes about Religion*, ſaid Juditious and Learned *Grotius*, *are the moſt pernicious and deſtructive*; *where Proviſion is not made for* Diſſenters: *The contrary moſt happy*; As in *Muſcovy*. He further ſays upon the occaſion of *Campanella*, *That not a rigid*, *but eaſie Government*, *ſuits beſt with the Nothren people*: He often pleads the relaxation of temporary Laws to be reaſonable and neceſſary. As in the Caſe of the *Curatij* and *Horatij*, and *Fabius Vitulanus*; and others ſtinted to *time* and *place*, as the *Jewiſh Laws*, &c. Polit. Maxims p. 12, 18, 78, 98.

18. The Famous *Ralcigh* tells us, That the way for Magiſtrates to govern well, and gain the eſteem of their Peo-

ple, *is to Govern by Piety, Justice, Wisdom, and a Gentle and Moderate Carriage towards them*: And that Disturbance attends those States, *where men are ruin'd or depress'd by Parties.* See his Observations and Maxims of State.

19. If I mistake not, the *French* and *Dutch Protestants* enjoy their Seperated Wayes of Worship in *London*, if not in other parts of these Lands, without Molestation; we do the like in remote Countries, *but not in our own.*

20. This must needs be the meaning of the learned *Doctor* to his inquisitive *Student*, in their Juditious Dialogue about the Fundamental Laws of the Kingdoms, when he says, That *such Laws as have not their Foundation in Nature, Justice, and Reason are void* ipso facto. And whether *Persecution* or *Restraint* upon Conscience be congruous with either, let the Impartial judge, *lib.* 1. *cap.* 6.

21. Doctor *Hammond* himself, and the grand Patron of the *English Church*, was so far from urging the Legality of *Restriction* in matters relating to Conscience, that he Writ, Argu'd, and left upon his dying-bed, his sense to the contrary: As the Author of his Life might have bin pleas'd to observe, but that interest stood in the Way; *the Doctor exhorting his his Party, Not to seek to Displace those then in the University, or to Persecute them for any matter of Religious Difference.*

22. That a person of no less ability in the *Irish* Protestant Church did the same; I mean Dr. *Jerem. Tayler*, his whole Discourse of *Liberty of Prophecy*, is a most pregnant demonstation.

23. It was the Saying of a Person once, too great to be nam'd now, *That Liberty of* Conscience *is every mans Natural Right; and he who is deprived of it, is a Slave in the midst of the greatest Liberty: And since every man should do as he would be done to, such only don't deserve to have it, that won't give it.*

24.

24. *Lactantius* reflects upon Perſecutors thus, *If you will with Blood, with Evil, and with Torment defend your Worſhip, it ſhall not thereby be Defended but Polluted*, lib. 5. cap. 20.

25. *Hillary* againſt *Auxentius*, ſaith, *The Chriſtian Church does not perſecute, but is perſecuted.*

26. *Jerom*, thus, *Hereſie muſt be cut off with the Sword of the Spirit*, Proæm lib. 4.

27. *Chryſoſtum* ſaith, *That it is not the manner of the Children of God to perſecute about their Religion*, but *an evident Token of* Antichriſt —— ——Relig. Uriſ. pag. 192.

28. *Stephen*, King of *Poland*, declared his mind in the point controverted, thus, *I am King of Men, not of Conſcience; a Commander of Bodies, not of Soul's.*

29. The King of *Bohemia* was of Opinion, *That mens Conſciences ought in no ſort to be Violated, Urg'd, or Conſtrain'd.*

30. And Laſtly, Let me add (as what is, or ſhould be now of more force) the Sence of King *James*, and King *Charles* the firſt, Men fam'd for their great natural abilities, and acquir'd Learning; *That no man ought to be puniſhed for his Religion, nor diſturbed for his Conſcience; In that it is the Duty of every man to give what he would Receive.* 'It is a ſure Rule in Divinity, *ſaid King* James, 'that God never loves to plant his Chuch by Violence and 'Bloodſhed. *And in his Expoſition on* Rev. 20. he ſaith, 'That PERSECUTION is the Note of a Falſe 'Church. And in the laſt Kings Advice to the preſent King, he ſays, 'Take heed of Abetting any Factions; 'your partial adhearing to ANY ONE SIDE gains 'you not ſo great advantages in ſome mens hearts (*who are 'prone to be of their Kings Religion*) as it loſeth you in others, 'who think themſelves, and their profeſſion firſt diſpis'd, then 'perſecuted by you.

Again, '*Beware of* Exaſperating *any Faction by the Croſ-*

'*ness and Asperity of some mens Passions, Humours, or pri-*
'*vate Opinions imployed by you*, grounded only upon their dif-
'ference in lesser matters, which are but the Skirts and Sub-
'urbs of Religion. *Wherein a Charitable Connivence, and*
'*Christian Tolleration, often dissipates their strength*, whom
'rougher opposition fortifies, *and puts the* despised *and* oppres-
'sed Party, *into such combinations as may most enable them to get*
'*a full revenge on those they count their Persecutors*, who are
'commonly assisted *by that vulgar Commiseration, which at-*
'*tends all that are said to suffer under the notion of Religion.*

'Always keep up SOLLID PIETY and those
'fundamental Truths (which mend both hearts and lives
'of men) with *Impartial Favour* and *Justice*. Your Pre-
'rogative is best shown and exercis'd in *Remitting*, rather
'then *Exacting* the rigour of Laws; there being nothing
'worse than *Legal Tyranny* ——

NOW upon the whole, we ask, What can be more *Equal, what more Reasonable then Liberty of Conscience*; so correspondent with the *Reverence* due to God, and *Respect* to the *Nature, Practice, Promotion*, and *Rewards of the Christian Religion*; the *Sense* of *Divine Writ*; the Great *Priviledge* of *Nature*, and Noble *Principle of Reason*; the *Justice, Prudence*, and *Felicity* of *Government*; And Lastly, to the *Judgment* and *Authority* of a whole Cloud of Famous *Witnesses*, whose *Harmony* in Opinion, as much detects the Unreasonableness, and Incharity of *Persecutors*, as their savage Cruelties imply an high contempt of so sollid determinations, of which number I cannot forbear the mention of two, whose Actions are so near of kin

kin to one another, and both to Inhumanity, as the same thing can be to it self.

The first is a great *Lord* of *Buckingham-shire*, but so hearty a *Persecutor* of the poor *Quakers*; that rather then they should peaceably enjoy the Liberty of Worshipping God (and to supply the County defect of Informers) he has encourag'd a pair of such Wretches, that it had been a *Disgrace* for the meanest *Farmer* to converse with; one having been Prisoner in *Alsbury* for *Theft*, and said to have been Burnt in the Hand; and the other of a Complexion not much less Scandalous and Immorral.

To give an undeniable Testimony of their *Merit* once for all, I shall briefly relate a most *notorious* piece of *Perjury*. They suspecting a religious Assembly to be at a certain place in the same *County*, came, and finding once in reallity, repaired to one they call Sr. *Tho. Clayton*, and a Justice, where they depos'd, *That not only a Meeting was at such an House, but one* Tho. Zachery *and his Wife were there*, who at the same time (as at the Tryal upon Indictment for *Perjury* at *Alsbury* was proved by sufficient Witnesses from *London*) were then in that City, yet fined not only for being there, but for the Speaker also, though none spoke that Day.

Upon the prosecution of these men as perjur'd men, and by the Law *disprivileg'd of all Imp'y*, and never to be credited more in Evidence; several delays were made, much time spent, and not a little pains bestow'd, all in hopes of an Exemplary *Success*, which prov'd so, but the wrong way; for the very last *Sessions*, when the matter should have receiv'd an absolute *Decission, and the Attendants have been dismist* (especially on the score of the Witnesses, that came from *London* the second *time* upon no other account) a Letter was reported to have bin writ from the aforesaid Lord, in favour of these Informers, to this pur-

purpose, *That since Sr* Tho. Clayton *was not present, the business could not well be determined, but if the Court would undertake the ending of it, he beseecht them to be favourable to those* HONEST MEN. If this be as true as said, 'tis a most aggravated shame to *Nobility:* what! to protect them from the Lash of Law, who went about to destroy *Truth* the Life of it: 'Tis a *Dishonour to the Government, a Scandal to the County, and a manifest Injury to an inofensive and useful Inhabitant.*

'Tother is as well known by his *Cruelty* as by his *Name*, and he scarce deserves another; However, he is understood by that of the *Reading Knight, Arrant*, and always in Armour for the Devil; a man whose life seems to be whole BONNER *reviv'd*: Hogestraut, *the Popish inquisitor*, could not hate *Martin Luther* more, then he does a poor Dissenter; and wants but as much Power, as he has Will, to hang more then he has Imprisoned. The Laws made against *Papists*, he inflicts upon the *Quakers*; *And makes it Crime enough for a Premunire to have an Estate to lose.*

The single Question is not, *Were you at such a Meeting?* which the Act intends: *But will you Swear?* which it intends not; *and Women escape him as little for this, as those of his own Tribe do for* SOMETHING ELSE: But what of all things most aggravates the mans Impiety, is, the making a Devillish Snare of a Christian Duty; since such as have come to Visit the Imprison'd, have been imprisoned themselves for their Charity; so that with him it seems a current Maxime, That those must not come to see Prisoners, and not be such themselves, who will not take the Oath of Allegiance to do it.

To relate the whole *Tragedy*, would render him as *Bad*, as the Discourse *Big*; and the latter not less *Voluminous*, then the former *Odious*. But three things I shall Observe.

First,

First, That he has crouded 72. Persons (of those called *Quakers*) Men and Women, immodestly into Goal, not suffering them to enjoy common Conveniencies. And for his Diversion, and the Punishment of little Children, he pours cold Water down their Necks

2d, His Imprisonments are almost perpetual; *first he premunires them*, without any just cause of suspition; *then imprisons them*; and lastly, *plunders them*, and that by a Law enacted against *Romanists*; which if all be true, that is said, *is more his concern then theirs*; if without offence, it may be suppos'd he has any Religion at all.

3d, Some have been there about eight years, and should be eighteen more, were he as sure to live (being more then 70, and enjoy his power, as doubtless he hopes to die before those *good Laws* over-take him, that would make an Example of such an Oppressor: In short, Wives, Widdows, Poor, and Fatherless, are all Fish for his Net; and whether over or under Age he casts none away, but seems to make it his Priviledge to correct Law by out-doing it. When we have said all we can (and we can never say too much, (if enough) he is still his own best *Character*.

Such are the *Passions*, *Follies*, and *Prejudices*, men devoted to a spirit of *Imposition* and *Persecution*, are attended with,

Non enim possumus quæ vidimus, et audivimus non loqui.

In short, What Religious, what Wise, what Prudent, what Good-natured Person would be a Persecutor? *Certainly its an office only fit for those, who being wide of all reason, to evidence the verity of their own Religion, fancy it to be true, from that strong Propensity and greedy Inclination they find in themselves to persecute the Contrary*; A Weakness of so ill consequence to all civil

civil Societies, that the admiſſion it ever was, and ever will prove their utter Ruin, as well as their great Inſelicity, who purſue it.

And though we could not more effectually expreſs our Revenge, *then by leaving ſuch perſons to the ſcope of their own Humors*: Yet being taught to *Love and Pray for our very Perſecutors*, we heartily wiſh their better Information, that (if it be poſſible) they may act more ſutably to the good pleaſure of the Eternal Juſt God, and beneficially to theſe Nations.

To conclude, *Liberty of Conſcience* (as thus ſtated and defended) *we ask, as our undoubted Right by the Law of God, of Nature, and of our own Country*: *It has been often promiſed, we have long waited for it*; *we have Writ much, and Suffered more in its Defence*; and have made many true Complaints, but found little or no Redreſs.

However we take the Righteous Holy God to Record againſt all Objections, that are ignorantly, or deſignedly raiſed againſt us. That,

1ſt, *We hold no Principle deſtructive of the Engliſh Government.*

2d, *That we plead for no ſuch* Diſſenter (*if ſuch an one there be.*)

3d, *That we deſire the Temporary and Eternal Happineſs of all* Perſons (in Submiſſion to the Divine Will of God) *heartily forgiving our Cruel* Perſecutors.

4thly, And Laſtly, *We ſhall engage by God's aſſiſtance to lead peaceable, juſt, and induſtrious lives amongſt men, to the good and example of all.* But if after all we have ſaid, this ſhort Diſcourſe ſhould not be credited, nor anſwer'd in any of its ſober Reaſons and Requeſts; but Sufferings ſhould be the preſent Lot of our Inheritance from this Generation,

be

be it known to them all, *THAT MEET WE MUST, and MEET, we cannot but encourage all to do (whatever Hardship we ſuſtain) in Gods Name and Authority, who is Lord of Hoſts, and King of Kings; at the revelation of whoſe Righteous Judgments and Glorious Tribunal, Mortal Men ſhall render an Account of the Deeds done in the Body:* And whatever the Apprehenſions of ſuch may be, concerning this Diſcourſe, 'twas writ in Love, and from a true ſenſe of the preſent State of things; and *TIME*, and the *EVENT* will vindicate *it* from Untruth. In the mean while, 'tis matter of great Satisfaction to the Author, that he has ſo plainly cleared his Conſcience, *in pleading for the Liberty of other Mens*, and publickly born his honeſt Teſtimony for God, *not out of ſeaſon to his POOR COUNTRY.*

Postscript.

A few brief Observations upon the late Act, and the usual Tearms of Acts of this Nature.

That which we have to say, relates, either to the Tearms of the *Act*, or the Application of them to us.

As to the Tearms of the *Act*, they are these; *Seditious Conventicles*, *Seditious Sectaries*, and *Meetings under Colour or Pretence of Religion*, P. 1.

1. SEditious, from *Sedition*, imports as much as *Turbulent*, *Contentious*, *Factious*, *which sowes Sirife, and Debate, and Hazards the Civil Peace of the Government.*

2. Conventicle, *is a diminutive private Assembly, designning and contriving Evil to particular Persons, or the Government in general*, see Lamb. p. 173. In *Tertullians* sense it is an *Assembly of Immodest and Unclean Persons*; at least, it was so taken in those dayes, and objected against the Christians, as their Practice, whom he defends, *Tertul. Apol.*

3.

3. Sectaries, *must be such as dis-joyn or dis-member themselves from the Body of Truth, and confess to a Strange and Untrue Opinion. If any Subject of this Realm, being Sixteen Years of Age, or upwards; shall be present at any Assembly, Conventicle, or Pretence of Religion*, &c. which can signifie no more then thus much, *That true it is, some may meet and assemble to Worship God, and upon a Religious Account, that are Dissenters*, such we censure not; but those, *who under Colour or Pretence of any Exercise of Religion* Conspire, &c. they are to be suspected and prosecuted. This being the true Explanation of the Tearms of the Act; we proceed to shew how unreasonably they are apply'd to us.

First, Words are but so many intelligible Marks, and Characters, set, and employ'd, to inform us of each orhers Conceptions, and therein of the nature of those things they stand for: Now because we take the Act to mean what it speaks, and that the Law concludes no man Guilty upon Conjectures, but from the detection of some Fault, We affirm our selves altogether unconcern'd in that word, *Seditious*; because 'twas never our practice, in Words or Actions, to disturb the Government; *or suggest Principles that might hatch Conspiracies, or feed the vulgar with Disaffection to their Rulers*: But before the King's coming in, at his coming in, and ever since; notwithstanding our frequent Suffering, *we have made it our Business to Heal Animosities, Preach Forgiveness, and Charity amongst men*; and that they would by an hearty Repentance turn to God, rather then hunt after Revenge upon one another: Therefore we assert, we have not done one thing that may be prov'd *Seditious* in the sence above mention'd.

2. That we are Strangers to *Conventicles* is most evident; for, where the parts that render it such, are wanting, there

can be no Conventicle; but that they are in our Assemblies, appears.

First, *Because our Meetings are not small.* 2. *Neither are they Private or Clandestine; but in the view of all People.* 3. Nor are they Riotous, Licentious, or otherwise Immodest, or Immorral; but on purpose to diswade persons from such Impieties; so that we are clear in the Interptetation of the Law, 13 *Hen.* 5. cap. 8. 19. and 19 *H.* 7. cap. 13. and in the sense of the famous Father *Tertullian.*

3. *Sectaries*, is a word, that whosoever has but confidence enough to conceit himself in the Right, by consequence wants none to suppose the contrary in the Wrong, and so to call him a *Sectary*; but this is but a meer begging of the Question: For, to say those are *Sectaries*, do's not conclude them such, nor does the Act speak so plainly of *Dissenters*: but granting it did, yet they must be *Seditious Ones*, or else all will be in vain; where we may observe, that purely to be a *Sectary*, is not what the Act strikes at, but to be a *Seditious One*: For, a man may differ in Judgment about matters of Faith, from the National Religion, and yet correspond with the Government in matters civil: So that ACT upon the whole, aims not at *Sectaries* simply, but they must be such as are Enemies to the civil constitution to be tendred *Seditious ones*, from which we have sufficiently clear'd our selves.

4. *That we meet under Colour and Pretence, and not really to Worship God*; we deny, and none can prove. 'Twere high Incharity to affirm positively, *This, or that People met only under a Colour of Religion*; yet unless the Act had so expres'd it self, we conceive their Authority lame and imperfect that persecute us by it. It will help but little to say, *The King, Lords and Commons, by the following words, In other manner*

then

then according to the Liturgy of the Church of England; *meant, that such meet under a Pretence that did not conform to the Worship*; since the precedent words say, *under Colour or Pretence of any Exercise of Religion, in other manner, &c.* So that they are only struck at, who are not sincere Dissenters, but that are such, with Design to carry on another End.

Object. But may some say, *'Tis granted, you have very evidently evaded the force of the Act, so far as relate to these recited Expressions: But what if a Bill be ready, for an Explanatory and Supplementory Act to the former, wherein this Scope for Arguments will not be found, because your Meetings will be absolutely adjudged Seditious, Riotous, and Unlawful.*

To which we Answer, That as the granting of the first, which none reasonably can deny is a manifest Impeachment of such as have violently prosecuted people for being present at Religious Assemblies (almost to their utter Undoing) so shall we as easily answer the second, which amounts to the force of an *Objection*, and briefly thus.

First, It is not more impossible for *Mankind* to preserve their *Society* without *Speech*, then it is absolutely requisit that *the Speech be Regular and Certain.* For, if what we call a *Man*, a *Lion*, a *Whale* to day; we should call a *Woman*, a *Dogg*, a *Sprat* to morrow; there would be such Uncertainty and Confusion, as it would be altogether impossible to preserve *Speech* or *Language* intelligible.

Secondly, It is not in the power of all the men in the *World to reconcile an absolute Contradiction, to convert the nature of Light into that of Darkness, nor to enact a thing to be that which it is not*; but that those endeavour to do, who think of making

king our Religious Meetings *Routs* and *Riots*; for first they offer Violence to our common Propriety of Language, it being the first time that ever a Religious and Peaceable Assembly would be enacted a Rout or Riot: *Nature, Reason, the Law of the Land, and Common Practice, and Observation*, give a clear contrary definition of a *Rout and Riot*.

Secondly, they endeavour to reconcile Contradictions; *for they would have a thing that which by nature it cannot be*; for that which is *Peaceable* cannot be *Riotous*, and what is *Religious* can never be *Seditious*. For any to say our *Meetings are not Religious*, is not only a poor *Evasion*, but great *Incharity*; *for that is properly a Religious Assembly where Persons are congregated with a real Purpose of Worshipping God, by Prayer, or otherwise, let the Persons met be esteem'd Doctrinally Orthodox, or not.* Can any be so Ignorant, or so Malitious, as to believe we do not Assemble to Worship God, to the best of our Understanding? If they think otherwise, they must, and do assume unto themselves a Power, beyond the Arrogancy of the POPE himself, that never yet adventur'd to tell man his Thoughts, nor the Purposes and Intents of his heart, which he, or they must do, that definitively judge our Assemblies, *void of Sword or Staff, Drum or Musket, Tumult or Violence*; *and circumstantiated with all the Tokens of Christian Devotion*, a Rout or a Riot. And truly, If *Protestants deny the Legality of those Acts or Edicts, which were contrived and executed in order to their suppression, by the respective Kings and Parliaments that own'd the Romish Faith and Authority, where they either did, or do live, let them not think it strange, if we on the same Tearms* (namely, Scruple of Conscience) *refuse compliance with their Laws of Restraint.* And as the first Reformers were no whit daunted at the black Characters the *Romanists* fastened on them; neither thought their *Assemblies* in

a way

a way of profeſt ſeperation, the more unlawful, for their repreſenting them ſuch; no more are we ſurpriz'd or ſcar'd at the ugly *Phraſes*, daily caſt upon us by a ſort of men, that either do not know us, *or would not that others ſhould*: For we are not ſo eaſily to be Brav'd, Menac'd, or Perſecuted out of our *Senſe*, *Reaſon*, and *Priviledge*.

They ſay, *LOSERS have leave to ſpeak*; at leaſt, we take it; none being greater *Loſers*, then ſuch as for *Diſſenting* from National Inſtitutions in point of Faith or Worſhip, are depriv'd of their Common *Rights*, and *Freedoms*, and hindred as much as may be, from Reverencing the God that made them, in the Way which to them ſeems moſt acceptable to Him.

To Conclude, We ſay; and by it let our Intentions in our whole Diſcourſe be meaſur'd, that we have not defended any *Diſſenters*, whoſe *Quarrel* or *Diſſent* is rather *Civil* and *Political*, then *Religious* and *Conſcientious*; for, both we really think ſuch unworthy of Protection from the Engliſh Government, who ſeek the ruin of it; and that ſuch as are Contributaries to the preſervation of it, (though Diſſenters in point of Faith or Worſhip) are unqueſtionably intituled to a Protection from IT.

THE END.